arras days

14th edition

2025

BOOK OF PROJECTS

November, 15-16

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arras days
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2025

THE JURY

SIMONE BAUMANN

She studied Philosophy in Rostov/Don and worked as a research assistant at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Her career in documentaries began in the early 1990s at MDR in Dresden. In 1997, she became a managing partner for LE Vision Film und Fernsehproduktion. As a producer, she was responsible for all of LE Vision's documentary productions. In 2003, she was appointed a member on the boards of AG DOK and MFFV and became German Films' representative for Eastern Europe in 2005. She had been responsible as Executive Producer Documentary for the documentary projects at Saxonia Entertainment GmbH since 2011. She has been managing director of German Films since 2019.

BRUNO DELOYE

He began his career at Région Câble as deputy director of development and launched France's first pay-per-view channel in 1991. In 1995, he founded Muzzik, the first television channel dedicated to classical music, jazz and dance. In 2000, he joined Canal+ Thématique, where he successively held the positions of director of CinéClassic in France, Spain and Italy. He was director of the Ciné + Club channels dedicated to arthouse cinema and emerging talent, and of Ciné + Classic dedicated to heritage cinema until 2025. For more than 20 years, he has participated in the co-production of more than 800 documentaries on cinema, proof of his commitment to building the memory of the future.

MIROLJUB VUCKOVIC

Film critic, author and producer of several TV interviews with leading figures in cinema, he began his career at the Yugoslav Film Institute, participating in various projects and retrospectives. He became its managing director in 1995, a position he held for a decade, contributing to the preservation and dissemination of the national film heritage. From 1997 to 2010, he was program director of the Belgrade International Film Festival and chairman to South-East European Cinema Network (2001–2005). In 2006, he founded the East West Crossings Film Promotion Fund, dedicated to film cooperation. At the Film Center Serbia, he served successively as interim director (2007–2013) and as head of International Relations and Promotion.

EDITORIAL

Born at the initiative of the Arras Film Festival, this co-production platform is innovative and atypical in concept, and it offers an introduction to yet-to-be-screened European film projects still at the writing stage, most of them seeking co-production partners.

For us, this constitutes a new way of supporting the directors and producers presenting a film in the European Competition, Eastern Visions or European Discoveries during the current edition of the festival. In coming here to present their film, they are able to submit their very latest project for consideration by a jury. So the ArrasDays are a unique and precious opportunity to experience this absolutely premiere and to be the very first to see up-and-coming works.

In 2022, the ArrasDays has become a co-production forum offering French and European producers and directors the opportunity to meet public and private institutional players in the film industry, key actors in the world of cinema from various countries, regions, support funds and distributors. This project is part of our creation support strategy, our objective being to bring on young creatives in the field of fiction in the Hauts-de-France Region.

For the past 4 years, Arras Film Festival will focus on a country to discover its creative dynamic. For this edition, the guest country is Poland. The 5 projects presented are in various stages of development, from treatment to full scenario or Work in Progress. With no competition at stake, this component aims to introduce you to talents they will come and talk to you about their work and their needs.

We would like to thank the Polish Film Institute in Warsaw and the Polish Institute in Paris, our partners for these events, for their valuable advice and support.

We wish you all two intense days of exchanges and meetings.

Nadia Paschetto and Dany de Seille
Executive Director and Industry Project Coordinator

To Myriam Gast

2 DAYS TO DISCOVER PROJECTS AND MEET PEOPLE

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

Saturday 15 November, 10.00am to 11.00am - Hôtel de Guînes

on the subject "Co-production and co-financing of a first feature film" will be held at the opening of the pitches session.

Key participants:
Frédérique Dumas, producer (Inga Films)
Bruno Deloye, former director of Ciné+
Moderator: the producer **Guillaume de Seille** (Arizona films)

This project is part of our creation support strategy, our objective being to bring on young creatives in the field of fiction in the Hauts-de-France Region.

PRESENTATION OF NEW FILMS PROJECTS

Saturday 15 November, 11.30am to 4,30pm - Hôtel de Guînes

Project representatives will have 30 minutes to present their films in front of an audience of film professionals and a **Jury** made up of:
Simone Baumann, Managing director of German Films
Bruno Deloye, former director of Ciné+
Miroljub Vuckovic, International Relations and Promotion Film Center Serbia

To support the development of these new projects, two grants are awarded by the jury: one for €7,500 granted by the Arras Film Festival and the other for €5,000, granted by the Town of Arras.

FOCUS ON POLAND

Sunday 16 November, 10.00am to 11.00am - Megarama

The festival continues its tour of Europe to highlight the creative energy of a country. This year, the guest country is **Poland**. The festival presents five projects, from screenplay stage to WIP, whose makers will come to talk about their originality and explain their needs for these films, be they in the making or near completion.

During those two days, professionals who wish to do so will be able to meet project leaders during individual meetings.

ARRASDAYS 2025

PROJECTS IN DEVELOPMENT

MAGOA

Jean-Benoît Ugeux (Belgium)

SYNOPSIS

Thiago left Portugal with his mother, Monica, who became a nanny in Brussels for the wealthy Seghers family. One day, Mrs. Seghers discovers that Thiago has a sensitivity for classical music. A bond develops between them, giving Thiago hope for a life full of promise. But it threatens Monica's relationship with her only son.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

My parents divorced when I was two years old. Every other Friday, I would put on my traveling clothes, which I would take off as soon as I arrived at my father's house. I would spend the weekend going to the movies, eating at fancy restaurants, and receiving expensive gifts, before putting my tunic back on and returning to my neighbourhood.

In *Magoa*, Thiago is also torn between countries, families, and cultural references that are diametrically opposed. At his young age, he makes choices that are not well thought out.

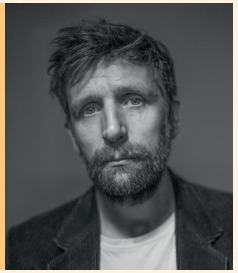
Blinded by the siren call of a hypothetical musical career, as well as by the attention of a woman waiting for recognition, he finds himself tossed about by the desires and expectations of others.

Although the film is inspired by my latest short film, *Winter*, I mainly retained the theme of class struggle from it. In order to develop this theme, the idea of emotional purchase emerged as the common thread of my story, illustrating how the power of money, undoubtedly linked to the prestige of cultural background, allows for the emotional recovery of a teenager to whom fate had not, a priori, made any great promises.

I have always been careful to defend systematically the points of view of each of the characters. Because reality is multifaceted and versatile.

Finally, the important characteristics of my writing are confusion and the unsaid. Because, as René Char said, "*To name things badly is to bring misfortune to the world.*"

Jean-Benoît Ugeux



Jean-Benoît Ugeux is a Belgian writer, actor and director of theatre and film. Alongside his acting career, he started directing in 2012 and has directed *VALEURS, Eastpak, La musique, Abada, Belgium-20, Arbres, Fratres, Little jailhouse on the prairie* and Maturity. Today he works mainly as a director, making both fiction and documentaries. He is currently editing a documentary on the pilgrimage of Lourdes and has begun shooting his second feature-length fiction film alongside a documentary on the Brussels dustmen. He also does ceramics, pinhole photography, cyanotypes and badges.

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ARRASDAYS 2025

THE BLOCK UNIVERSE

Stephan Komandarev (Bulgaria)

SYNOPSIS

Inspired by physics theory that all events happen simultaneously, Sofia ambulance crew Elza and Zhoro appear in five interconnected stories from 1989-2030. They deliver a baby in '89, lose one in '97 protests, face violence in '07, confess love in '13, reunite with the grown baby in '30. Time loops as their past selves witness their future crash.

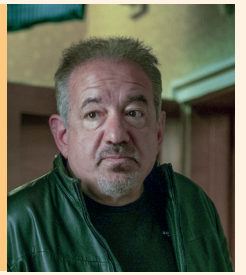
DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The "social sci-fi" film project *The Block Universe* consists of five stories that happen to the same ambulance team (doctor and driver), driving down the streets of Sofia during different time periods – between 1989 and today. They're our two main characters, they've witnessed reality – including its dark side, they've seen all its stages, changes, hopes and failures from 1989 until today. They are part of the real world, not the made up "reality" that the media present us with. The rest of our cast are the people these paramedics encounter during their shifts – the different faces of Bulgarian society.

The periods in time we have chosen correspond to key periods in our character's lifetimes – the inexperience of youth, the disappointment of middle age, the exhaustion and wisdom of old age. They're also connected to key moments in the history of our society and its difficult and always elusive "growth" – the hope of November 10th 1989, the protests of 1997, the new hope of Bulgaria joining the EU in 2007, more protests in 2013, up to near future's "timelessness" and exhaustion.

Inspired by the physical theory of the "block universe," according to which all events happen simultaneously, past and future collide while time repeats itself. This will be represented in the film through a series of cinematic "bridges" between different episodes and encounters of the heroes with themselves at their different ages.

Stephan Komandarev



Stephan Komadarev is a Bulgarian director, producer and scriptwriter, who has a number of award-winning films such as: *Made in EU* (2025) – official selection Venice Film Festival – Spotlight section, Grand Prix "Golden Rose" - best Bulgarian film 2025; *Blaga's Lessons* (2023) - Grand Prix Cristal Globe and Best Actress Award - Karlovy Vary IFF; *Directions* (2017) - Un Certain Regard, Cannes film festival; *The World Is Big And Salvation Lurks Around The Corner* (2008) - the first Bulgarian film, shortlisted for Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film (2010).

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KATHY MOVES

Marie Vernalde (France)

SYNOPSIS

Kathy's whole life is driven by one determination: to claim the child support she's owed. With kids to feed and rent to pay, she won't give up. But her ex has moved on, started a new life with new priorities, and refuses to pay. Evicted from her home, Kathy takes refuge in a shelter and starts the hard journey toward independence.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

In France, single-parent families make up one in four households. They are mainly composed of isolated mothers. 40% of child support payments are either not paid or only partially paid.

Like Kathy, I'm a single mother. I handle everything by myself. And sometimes, it all falls apart. It was through my encounters with social services that my desire was born to make a poor, unqualified woman the main character of a film, with the absence of fathers and its consequences as the central theme. Kathy came from my need to see this woman represented on screen and to offer, through her journey, a way out.

This is the portrait of this woman, Kathy, who has done nothing else but raise children all her life; she is not qualified for anything else. She has not learned to be independent, which is what I want her to learn. So, this is also a story of empowerment. Kathy is not without flaws or seriousness, but her vitality pushes her toward the light. She is intense and explosive, driven by her survival instinct.

The film won't be without gravity, but laughter will act as a release through situations, contrasts, lively dialogue, and the actors' virtuosity. The actors are what matter most to me. Each will bring their own music to create the essentiel nuances of the story. Even the secondary characters face a reality that strips them of carefreeness, though each will carry a different rhythm, a different inner world. Together, we will uncover a stage where the world of these women, men, and children reveals itself—its harsh edges, but also its humanity.

Marie Vernalde

Marie Vernalde began her career as an actress. She wrote and directed 3 short films: *The Visiting Room*, selected at numerous international festivals including Namur, Odense, as well as Brest and Cabourg; *For the best*, broadcast on ARTE, and *No Gift* in which she acted alongside her son, selected at festivals such as Berlin Interfilm where it won the Best Fiction Film award, as well as Tehran, Figari and Saint-Jean-de-Luz. It was broadcast on Canal+. In 2018, she joined LA FEMIS's screenwriting workshop. She currently lives in Amiens, where she is writing her first feature film *Kathy Moves*.

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ArrasDays 2025

ABSENCE

Eamonn Murphy (Ireland)

SYNOPSIS

When an Irish exchange student goes missing in the Nord–Pas-De-Calais region of France, a Parisian detective is brought in to help solve the case.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Absence is about how people deal with loss and uncertainty. It follows the disappearance of a young Irish student in northern France and the people drawn into the search, her parents, and a detective carrying her own quiet scars. The story looks at how grief, guilt, and desperation can change people, and how truth can become blurred by emotion and fatigue. The tone is restrained and realistic. Violence and emotion are shown without exaggeration. *Absence* is a portrait of people searching for answers, for forgiveness, and for a way to live with what remains unseen.

Absence explores how people respond to loss and uncertainty, and the quiet ways grief reshapes those left behind. It follows the disappearance of a young Irish student in northern France and the people drawn into the search. Her parents who struggle to hold their family together while searching for their daughter in a foreign country, and an emotionally closed off detective carrying her own quiet scars. Through them, the story explores how love, guilt, and desperation can distort perspective, and how the search for truth can become as consuming as the loss itself.

Set against the cold, rain-soaked landscape of northern France, the film's atmosphere is muted and grounded in everyday detail. The sound of passing trains, wet cobblestoned streets, and dim apartments create a sense of fatigue and unease. The world and its characters are weathered by its history, cast in a world of grey. The tone is realistic and restrained. Words are rarely spoken, because sometimes words aren't enough. Violence and emotion are shown without exaggeration or sentiment. This world is hard and brutal as each character navigates the tragedy while also battling their own inner demons from their own unique perspective. *Absence* looks at the quiet endurance that follows tragedy, the depths people are willing to go for those they love, and the uncertain line between justice, mercy, and revenge.

Eamonn Murphy

Eamonn Murphy is a writer and director from Dublin, Ireland. His two previous short films *A Better You* and *Lost Memories* can be seen on Disney+. His debut feature film *Solitary* won Best Independent Irish Film at the Galway Film Fleadh and has recently been selected for the Director's Debut competition at EnergaCamera Image Festival in Poland. His work focuses on character-driven narratives, with a strong emphasis on performance, atmosphere, and emotional truth.

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DEATH IN BABYLON

Teona Strugar Mitevska (North Macedonia)

SYNOPSIS

In the dark throne room of the Babylonian palace, on the sacred podium, lie two male bodies, clinging to each other: one is that of Alexander, motionless, his veins still pulsing even though he is presumed dead; the other is that of Bagoas, his eunuch lover who refuses to leave him. It is an ancient love story, whose relevance and significance persist to this day.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Alexander the Great was an inquisitive man, whose vision went well before his time. He dreamt of a multicultural world where the east and the west unite.

Unfortunately, his sudden death put an end to his plans. The mystery goes: for 6 days his body was not disintegrating, and nobody understood why. I, myself was always fascinated by the aspect of his sexuality, and the freedom he practiced.

A recent study by a New Zealand scientist offers an insight into the mystery of his death, it proclaims he was suffering from an autoimmune disease that left him paralyzed. This paints a horrifying picture of his slow death by hunger and thirst, while being astutely aware of his surroundings. And this is the premise of our story: for six days Alexander`s body is displayed in the throne room of the Babylon palace, and for six days he is an involuntary witness of his empire falling apart, intrigues, murders, betrayal, blood, violence, deception. Besides him, is Bagoas, his eunuch servant keeps him alive by secretly pouring water into his mouth while refusing to leave his sight. There is an intrigue within the story, a triller-like feeling regarding the question of who will take on the reign, as he witness his inner circle fighting for his kingdom.

After Alexander Sokurov`s tetralogy: *Taurus, Moloch*… where he captures the human demise, I follow with *Mother* and now *Death in Babylon*. Putting light on how we interpret history has become a great passion of mine.

Teona Strugar Mitevska

Teona Strugar Mitevska is an engaged filmmaker born in Skopje, Macedonia. She defines herself as a "femartivist," blending her artistic work and activism with a strong feminist perspective. She got her MA at New York University and she currently lives in Brussels. For her cinematic work, in 2018 she has been awarded with the title of Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. *Mother* is Teona`s first English language film. For the past two years she is a member of ESFUF, a CNC initiated European based emergency Ukranian cinema fund.

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ARRASDAYS 2025

THE WITCH

Piotr Domalewski (Poland)

SYNOPSIS

The town of Reszel. Early 19th century. Truda, the Mayor's servant, witnesses an argument - Barbara, a peasant woman, is accused of seducing a man with witchcraft by his jealous wife. In anger, Barbara exclaims that she wishes the couple would burn in hell. That same night, a fire breaks out and the witch hunt starts.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I have long been interested in the story of Barbara Zdunk. I come from the area around Reszel, and the legend of the last witch burned at the stake has always been part of local lore. Knowing the tragic history of these lands, it seems natural to me that such dramas would unfold there, on the border between Prussia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. As a director, I try to give each film I make a deeply personal and distinctive character. The same applies to *The Witch*. For me, the tragic story of Barbara Zdunk is a metaphor – timeless and universal. The community of a small town seeks to vent its anger on the weakest individual, deprived of rights. Zdunk – a defenseless maid – is the perfect scapegoat. The mechanism of lynching has remained unchanged since the dawn of civilization. It took place even in that small town in Warmia. I am interested in the process through which a community literally destroys an individual. The narrator of this story is Truda – the maid of the Mayor of Reszel. As a woman at the bottom of the social ladder, Truda cannot help Barbara Zdunk, whom she believes to be innocent. Yet she does everything in her power to act decently. She questions the easy, collective judgment and stands up to the Mayor, which brings her trouble.

Piotr Domalewski

Piotr Domalewski is an award-winning Polish film director, screenwriter, and actor. A graduate of the National Film School in Łódź, he gained acclaim with his debut *Silent Night* (2017), which won the Grand Prix at the Polish Film Festival and several Eagles Polish Film Awards. His later works, including *I Never Cry* (2020) and *Bread and Salt* (as co-writer), explore migration and family in modern Poland. His latest film, *The Altar Boys* (Ministranci, 2025), won the Golden Lions, Audience Award, Best Screenplay, and Best Editing at the Gdynia Film Festival.

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THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

Urška Djukić (Slovenia)

SYNOPSIS

Accused of witchcraft, pregnant Veronika seeks refuge in a Carthusian monastery, where Prior Arnold offers her shelter. Her healing skills soon prove invaluable, but her wild, curious nature unsettles the monks as Count Herman of Celje threatens to destroy anyone who dares protect her.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

In the 15th century, Slovenian lands were part of the Habsburg Monarchy. The forbidden love between Count Friderik II of Celje and Veronika of Desenice ended in one of Europe's first witch trials. Growing up, I read many works inspired by Veronika's story, all written by men, portraying her as fragile and submissive. But a woman who dared to defy Count Herman II was not weak. She was strong, resisting a system built to silence her. Through my research, I realized this is not just a love story but a reflection of patriarchal cruelty, the repression of female knowledge and sexuality as it touches on one of the deepest fears of the male world - the fear of women. Slovenian priest Karel Gržan believed Veronika was hiding in the Carthusian Monastery in Jurklošter, where they discovered her grave in 2005. That inspired me to set the story in a male monastery and observe the relationship between monks, the guardians of knowledge, and a curious pregnant woman. Having recently become a mother, I've felt the sacred power of the female body, and how urgently this male-centered, controlling society must learn to honor it. At its heart, this project explores the wild, ancient female force long suppressed by the male order. Alongside her stands Prior Arnold, torn between faith, morality, and compassion, a man wrestling with the eternal conflict between conscience and power: a universal dilemma that resonates powerfully in our time. Veronika's story, marking its 600th anniversary, is not past; it's our mirror.

Urška Djukić

Urška Djukić Lecamus is one of Slovenia's most acclaimed film directors, known for her distinctive cinematic voice. Her short film *Granny's Sexual Life* won over 40 awards worldwide, including the 2022 European Film Award and the 2023 César. Her debut feature, *Little Trouble Girls*, developed at Cinéfondation and Torino Film Lab, won Best Project at Les Arcs and premiered at Berlinale 2025, where it received the FIPRESCI Award and a rare five stars from Peter Bradshaw in The Guardian. It has since won multiple festival prizes, got praising reviews, and is Slovenia's official submission for the Academy Awards.

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5 NEW PROJECTS FROM POLAND

WORKS IN PROGRESS

INSTITUT POLONAIS PARIS

POLISH FILM INSTITUTE

MILK

Natalia Pietsch

SYNOPSIS

Nina, a single woman, donates her egg to help her friend Filip and his partner Krzysiek start a family. She accompanies Filip to a surrogacy clinic in Kyiv, posing as his wife. The surrogate gives birth to their child. When Nina returns to Poland, she begins to realize her own needs, which she has long been suppressing.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I cannot answer for myself whether I want to become a mother. Perhaps that is why I was so moved by the story of my gay friend, who asked my single friend to donate her egg and accompany him to a surrogacy clinic in Kyiv. In this way, since surrogacy in Ukraine is available only to married couples, she would help him and his partner become parents.

I began to wonder how I would feel in her place – giving a part of myself, watching a child who is "not mine, yet mine," without responsibility for its future, and without the possibility of forming a close relationship with it. Would it give my life more purpose, or would I regret the decision? To what extent does my generation create false images of ourselves, disconnected from our needs and instincts, and to what extent are we self-aware?

At a formal level, I am interested in combining narrative and documentary. During shoots in the pre-production period in Ukraine, I had the chance to test this approach. Actress Małgorzata Gorol and my queer friend Dawid Nickel formed a genuine duo on and off set. Their characters gained depth through real interactions with the staff of the human reproduction center in Kyiv and the surrogate, who has had the difficult experience of giving up a child.

This working method – creating an environment from real elements that shapes actors' improvisation – is something I want to continue throughout the entire film.

Natalia Pietsch

Natalia Pietsch is a director, cinematographer, and screenwriter. Graduate of the Krzysztof Kieślowski Film School and the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice. Her debut documentary *Euphoria* was shown in cinemas and at major festivals. Her feature documentary *The Town That Drove Away* won an award at Visions du Réel in Nyon, one of the most important documentary film festivals in Europe. Winner of eight individual awards at international film festivals.

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SICK

Agata Trzebuchowska

SYNOPSIS

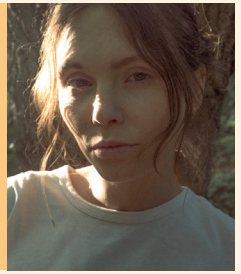
Sixteen-year-old Maks, a neurotic teen torn between a storm of hormones and a childhood he's not ready to leave behind, is sent to the Mazury countryside to care for his ailing grandmother. What was once a childhood haven now feels dark and alien. His beloved grandma no longer recognizes him, and his older sister Emma – shaken by a ruined tennis career – seeks comfort in drugs and detachment.

Their sibling dynamic, initially marked by rivalry, begins to shift in unsettling ways. As they cross erotic boundaries, something awakens: the unresponsive grandmother rises. On her bed lies what resembles shed skin, and she appears… younger. Her health improves rapidly, unnaturally. But the stronger she gets, the weaker Maks and Emma become. To survive, Maks must confront not only the monster she's become, but the terrifying end of innocence.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Our film explores adolescence as a slow-blooming horror-visceral, tender, and deeply unsettling. It's a story of bodies: aging, aching, desiring, shedding. At its core is the raw chaos of emerging sexuality, where longing and shame collide. Maks's world unravels through textures-shifting from raw naturalism to eerie dreamlike beauty. Here, horror emerges not from monsters, but from the quiet violence of change, the fear of losing control, and the inescapable end of innocence.

Agata Trzebuchowska



Agata Trzebuchowska is a Polish director and screenwriter, a graduate of the University of Warsaw (MISH), the Wajda School and the Screenwriting Atelier. She gained international recognition as the lead in the Oscar-winning film *Ida*. Her short *Skwar* premiered at Sundance, followed by *Pustostan* at major festivals. She also directs music videos and theatre pieces. Her non-fiction book *Clou* explores mental health taboos. She is now in post-production on *Sick*, securing financing for *This Is Not a Place for You,* and developing *Urke* with MFI Script2Film.

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PROJECTS IN DEVELOPMENT

INSTITUT POLONAIS PARIS

POLISH FILM INSTITUTE

THE CRACK

Katarzyna Iskra

SYNOPSIS

Aspiring pianist Róża faces health crisis that prevents her from playing. Awaiting diagnosis, she retreats to the mountains and reunites with Teresa, her gifted childhood friend. Secretly recording Teresa's haunting voice, Rose uncovers a mystery that may heal her.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I grew up in the Polish mountains believing my potential depended on how far I could go – the farther, the better. In *The Crack*, I explore what happens when that forward motion stops. When we're forced to pause – what do we notice, what do we lose?

Róża, an aspiring pianist, faces a health crisis that silences her music. She returns to her mountain village, where an encounter with Teresa exposes Róża's inner void and challenges her idea of success. Teresa becomes her reflection – someone less "accomplished," yet freer.

Their relationship blurs fascination and jealousy, past and present. As Róża secretly records Teresa's haunting voice, she begins to understand the healing power of Teresa's music, which reveals a different approach to life.

The Crack is a psychological drama and music-driven film with elements of a thriller. Music functions as a living character, rooted in the natural and mechanical sounds of the countryside. The film contrasts two sonic worlds – the city and the countryside – each defined by a distinct relationship to sound. By juxtaposing these spaces and the women who inhabit them, I aim to guide the viewer through a sensory journey that ultimately brings clarity, presence, and inner relief.

I want to show what it means to lose oneself in the pursuit of fulfillment in a world with no space for crisis or vulnerability – and the need for stillness in a culture obsessed with movement.

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Katarzyna Iskra

Katarzyna Iskra is a director and screenwriter raised in the Polish mountains. She studied Psychology, Hebrew Studies, and Directing at Gdynia Film School. Her film *Casting* won awards at festivals like Hamptons and Monterrey. *Untouched* was shortlisted at New Horizons 2023. Her latest short *Zmir*, awarded in a contest inspired by *Night Train* (Kawalerowicz), is in postproduction. *The Crack*, her feature debut, was awarded at New Horizons Studio+ and in a final of Script Wars.

LITTLE MARY, ALWAYS A VIRGIN

Anna Jadowska

SYNOPSIS

A 16-year-old Marysia tries to sell her virginity online. She arranges meetings with various men, thinking she can control the situation. However, she's not able to predict everything – most importantly, her own emotions.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Marysia is rebellious and independent. She believes that she's able to choose her own path and get where she wants without paying any price. She doesn't want to live like her mother, who, in her opinion, wasted her life by passively waiting for whatever fate would bring, and clinging to a succession of different men.

The film will be a coming-of-age story, depicting the life of the protagonist at a pivotal moment of entering adulthood and losing her virginity.

The relationship between Marysia and her younger sister is also crucial to me. Marysia can see herself in her younger sister like in a mirror; she's both annoyed by her childlike wonder, and simultaneously envious of her courage to speak the truth and expose herself to ridicule.

It is important to me how these three characters – mother and two daughters – perceive their own womanhood. Through them, I want to show how the faces of femininity change from generation to generation.

Anna Jadowska

Anna Jadowska is a Polish director. She directed the feature film *Touch Me* (2003), which received the Grand Prize at the Independent Film Competition in Gdynia and was presented during the International Film Forum at Berlinale. Her film *Wild Roses* premiered at the New Horizons IFF in Wrocław, received the Stockholm Impact Award at the Stockholm IFF in 2017, and won the Main Competition at the FilmFestival Cottbus. Her most recent film, *Woman On The Roof*, premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in the International Competition.

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RADIOAMATEUR

Thomas Habowski

SYNOPSIS

Krzysztof (65), a freshly retired working-class widower, is sent to a post-Soviet sanatorium. While his daughter urges him to confront years of buried grief, he isolates himself there with an old radio set, until a rebellious woman draws him into late-life intimacy.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I have the impression that we often place older people in the role of victims of their age. Yet, they are people capable of being swept away by emotions – I want to tell a story that shows that process.

The story also touches on other themes – in the protagonist, I see a man enslaved by outdated masculine norms. He is choking in an old costume that demands of him to be tough, closed off and cold. Work, which has been the foundation of his identity, suddenly ends. Who am I without work? Why was it so important to me? I wish to confront the protagonist with these questions.

With this film, I return to my home – the post-Soviet blocks – and I look at Krzysztof, a dear man for me, a witness to the events of the 80s, like Wajda's *Man of Iron* (1981), a participant in the changes of the 90s, like Kieślowski's protagonist of *Three Colours: White* (1994), a little forgotten "Polish worker". My father, my uncle, my neighbour and the father of my friends.

But the film, although shot on 16mm, does not mimic the past or anyone else's work. It has its own style – grounded in realism, but colourful, bright and funny, infused with some poetic elements: surreal dream sequences, long meditative shots and choreographed dance scenes. I call that style "romantic polishcore", blending nostalgia and modernity, sadness and humour, past and present.

Thomas Habowski

Tomasz Habowski is a director and screenwriter. As a screenwriter, he has worked for broadcasters such as TVN, Netflix, TVP, Canal+ and other online platforms, and written for the entertainment show SNL Polska. He made his big-screen directorial debit in 2021 with the film *Songs About Love*. The film was well-received by critics and audiences and named by the press as the biggest Polish box-office surprise of 2022. It also garnered several awards, including Best Film at the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia 2021.

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